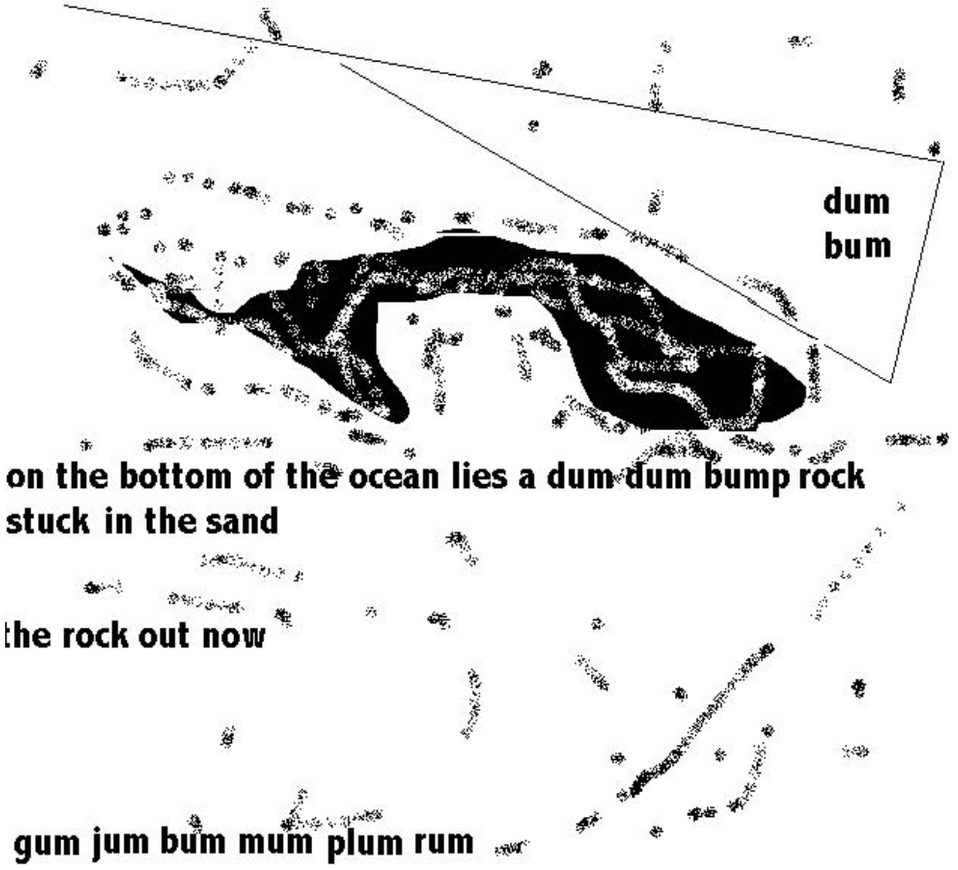

dum
bum
on the bottom of the ocean lies a dum dum bump rock
stuck in the sand
the rock out now
gum jum bum mum plum rum
Iris 6-vi-2012

MUSICAL DIALECTICS

On Friday 22nd May 2020, two members of XENOCHRONIC AMM ALL-STARS – Ben Watson and Jair-Rohm Parker Wells – used Zoom to discuss the music their international collective makes for two radio shows (LATE LUNCH WITH OUT TO LUNCH 2pm UTC Wednesdays, Resonance FM; THE OTL SHOW 8am UTC Fridays, Soho Radio). We present their words here because "As soon as one starts to talk about music, one enters the realm of thought, and no power on earth has the right to silence this." Theodor Adorno, 'Criteria of New Music', unpublished lecture, 1957, translated Rodney Livingstone, SOUND FIGURES (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 146.

SPECIAL NOTE #1

Xenochrony, or "experimental re-synchronisation" is the superimposition of music played at different times in different time signatures (xeno = alien; chronos = time), a term coined by Frank Zappa. The locus classicus for an explanation of this technique is the sleevenote for 'Rubber Shirt' on the album SHEIK YERBOUTI (1979), although Zappa hadn't invented the word then. Because he thought in time signatures, to his ear two different times – a medium tempo song in 4/4, say, and a slow song in 11/4 – "added up" to another time, the two signatures reconciling themselves at intervals like a complex Indian raga. Musicians must keep time for this to happen. If they slow down or speed up, the ear cannot resolve the two times into anything, and it becomes a mess. Since Covid lockdown (March 2020 onwards in London), Ben Watson has been using Xenochrony to combine recordings by AMM All-Stars to broadcast on his two radio shows, but not exclusively. Sometimes, AMM All-Stars "overdub" each others' contributions in real time. Watson also superimposes field recordings and sound effects whose time signatures, if feasible, were not consciously chosen by the environment. Derek Bailey, the founder of Free Improvisation in the UK, rarely listened to albums released "in the genre", preferring Soul and Gospel records. One of his objections to listening to records of Free Improvisation was that he'd rather be improvising himself, because then the outcome wasn't "gruesomely predictable". The term "Xenochrony" may have been coined by a musician he had no respect for (although when played Frank's guitar music in a blindfold test, Derek guessed "Sonny Sharrock", a guitarist he liked!), but Xenochrony makes listening to recordings an event in itself rather than a "substitute", so we like to think he'd have joined in (Derek died on Christms Day 2005). Bass-player and composer Simon H. Fell (who died 28th June this year, sorry about all this

morbidity!) used Xenochrony and called it by that name. When making superimpositions, the Xenochronist has full recourse to the layerings of irony noted in a composer like Gustav Mahler. Before recording, only scores could create these fascinating complexities, now Audacity software allows us to do this with the playing of musicians whose musical personalities haven't been erased by conservertoire training.

SPECIAL NOTE #2

AMM stands for ASSOCIATION OF MUSICAL MARXISTS, a political groupuscule formed by three ex-SWP (Socialist Workers Party) members which persisted in London 2010–2015, with twenty-two meetings, thirteen books published on the Unkant imprint, a lively website and a banner taken to demonstrations. The acronym was chosen to criticise the music and politics of AMM – the best known "brand" of UK Free Improvisation – as substanceless self-promotion of conceptual avantgarderie. AMM All-Stars were the musical wing of the Association and outlived the political side, which dissolved after its financial backer discovered his working-class accountant was robbing him blind.

Ben Watson: I think Captain Beefheart was correct in 1967 with 'Electricity' on Safe As Milk ... music today is all about electricity, but only in dialectical antagonism to our analogue ear drums and psychical daydreams. "Electronica" was a genre term conceived by idiots! The synthesizer track on a Muhal Richard Abrams album is a high point, but it upset me when they released an album of his "electronic work"; it prevented one understanding how he also used musicians and instruments to make the most pertinent records of his time – disregarding yesterday's titles like jazz, classical and pop. As Pierre Boulez pointed out, once it's a recording, Tchaikovsky is actually "electronic music". Acoustic purism has been a problem for jazz – what marred Fusion was not electricity, but its academic approach to time and harmony – and acoustic purism mars Free Jazz too. What I love about your albums, Jair-Rohm – AMGD, Salo, Koheleth, Stand Your Ground – is that they fully embrace electricity at the same time as registering the twitch of your physical body. The forensic glitterbang of your approach is crucial to AMM All-Stars in its Xenochronic incarnation. I imagine the mouldy old Free Jazz Revival – which markets saxophonists like their screaming and honking is going to blow up consumer capitalism – is uncomfortable with your devotion to electricity, which such persons bracket with Hip Hop and soundtracks for selling sportswear and trainers. Mostly people don't bow the electric bass ... you know, usually, if it's electric bass, you're plucking it. So, if you go electric, it's like whole bowing thing gets shut down. No long notes, so all dance – and minimal atmospherics ... Your approach is different, Jair-Rohm. Tell me something about your axes, man!

Jair-Rohm Parker Wells: I play an electric upright NSD bass designed by Ned Steinberger. It can be either plucked or bowed. Recently I have been playing a Chapman Stick, a 10-string fretted instrument which allows you to pluck notes in the upper register with your left hand and in the lower register with your right hand, outputting to two channels. Finally an instrument has arrived which recognises "hammering on" as a legitimate technique. It actually has more in common with the electric guitar than it does with the double bass.

Watson: Has it got a bridge, so you can get to the strings with the bow, or is it flat?

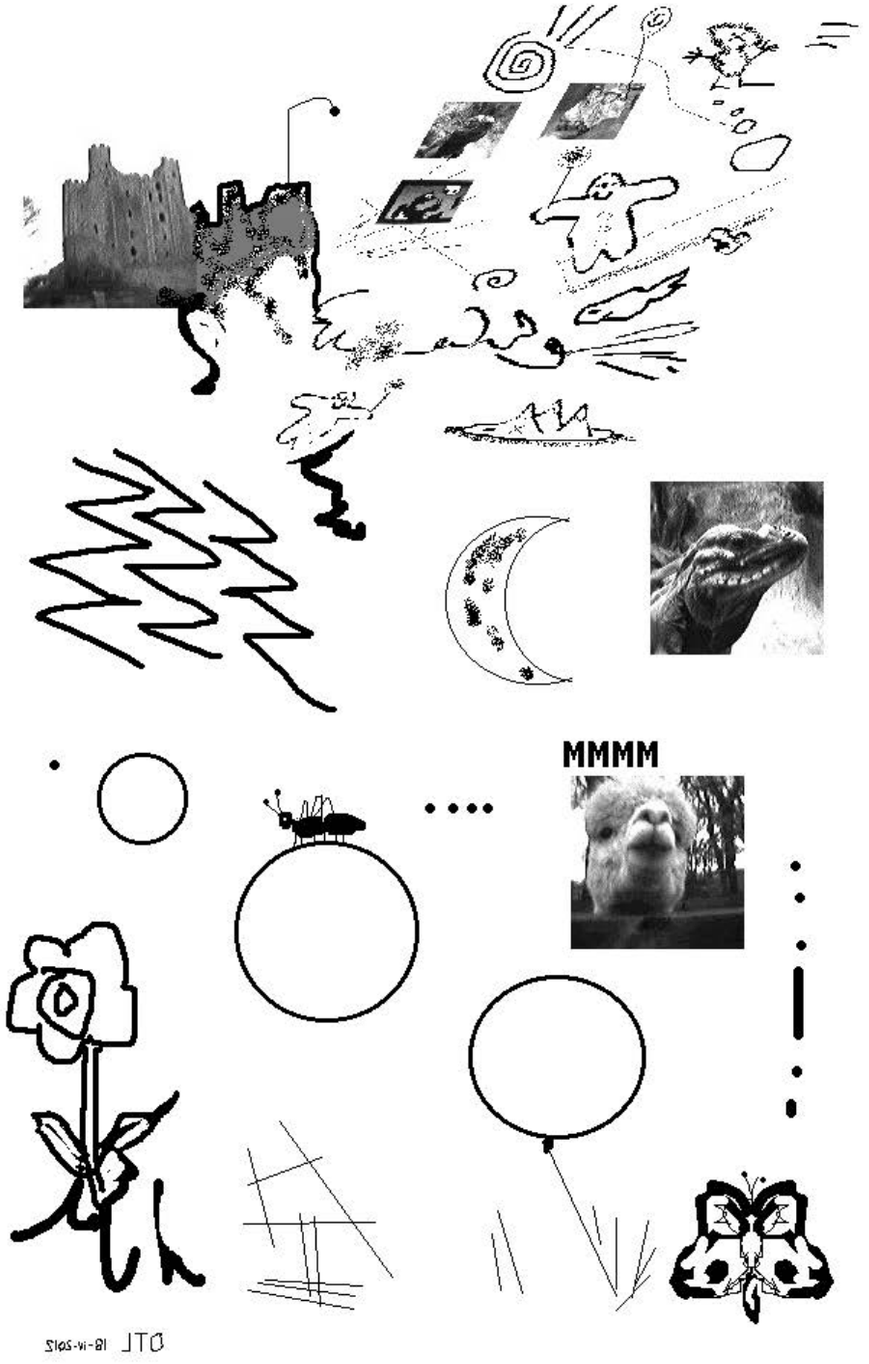
Wells: Actually, no, it's flat. The bridge is not really convex. You can only bow the outside strings. I have avoided bowing on it because I don't like to mess up the bottom of the instrument. [Wells plays Watson a Chapman Stick recording]. The thing with the Chapman Stick is that the instrument is only fifty years old, so it means that almost everyone who adopted it – and its inventor – is still alive and learning what the instrument can do. And we all know each other. There is no tradition, we're all making it up as we go along, and that's another reason why these comments you dug up from Derek Bailey about him "waggling his feet" were so incredibly enlightening.

SPECIAL NOTE #3

Wells is referring to an interview with Derek Bailey by Henry Kaiser from 21st October 1975 published by Henry Kutz in BELLS, and which was quoted by guitarist I Digress Indeed on the release of his album RETIREMENT MUSIC. In his characteristically crisp manner, Bailey explains how most people's idea of what music is prevents it happening. This interview became the basis of a Zaum-friendly episode of LATE LUNCH WITH OUT TO LUNCH called "Internationalist Tongue Waggle" <https://archive.org/details/InternationalistTongueWaggle19–ix–2012>. These are Derek Bailey's words ...

"There's a guy – Curt Sachs – an old German musicologist, dead now, but he's written some interesting stuff about ethnic music; he's written some interesting stuff about everything really. And he locates two centers – he calls them mind centers, but they are two general centers for producing music. And one he associates with song – the voice, and the other he associates with dance which is instrumental music. And he makes this point, which I like very much, that instrumental music's got nothing to do with song at all. I mean, there's this big thing you hear about every instrument, like making the piano "sing" and the violin "sing." And one of the main objectives of a lot of instrumentalists is this voice-like music. And it's considered a desirable thing to have this approximation of the voice. But he produces this argument that playing an instrument has absolutely nothing to do with the voice at all. It doesn't use the same nerve centers, mind centers, whatever you like. He makes this point that it's all associated with physical movement, the dance largely. And I like that very much. And you can hear it in Free Improvisation, though he's talking largely about ethnic music. And he puts in this description about drummers; like most drummers, the way they play is dictated just by where the drum is. What do the feet do? The feet might not be making any sound at all, but the feet are going like mad when they're playing. And possibly, depending on whether the ground is wet or whether it's dry effects what they play on the drum. And I can see that entirely. And you can hear it.

In Free Improvisation, you get this purely physical – and I don't just mean the sort of heavy German physical strength type thing, but like the nervous system taking over. Now, allying that sort of natural instrumental drive which is associated with the dance to a deliberate control of all four limbs in a particular way is a strange thing to do, you know; to not lose that feeling, that sort of "up



there" feeling for about thirty minutes, the tenseness, committedness, that involvement, whatever it is – and yet still be trying to do something with absolute control. And I have one or two exercises for that type of thing which has to do with waggling feet and doing certain things on the instrument."

Wells: After reading that, I realised that I can do whatever I want to do with this instrument! I just need to know what I want to do. Derek, from the beyond – through I Digress Indeed and your radio show – gave me that license. It was, like, Improvisation is actually dance music. You know, I've been working on some improvisations today, and it's much more animated, not as electronic sounding. You know, more sort of like guitar-meets-bass [plays recording]. Like trying to play and sound like Derek and myself together. Or, like I told my teacher the other day, if I had a goal, if I had a target, someone I would like to imitate on the instrument, it would be Cecil Taylor. I want to sound like Cecil Taylor on the Chapman Stick! Getting back to electronics, Cecil and I had a conversation about the issue once. The reason why he never hired me was because I was playing electric bass. I told him I could play an acoustic bass guitar, but he really had his mind set on this question. He did say one thing, because there was this project I proposed to him that included electronics, and he said: "You go ahead and do that, I give you all the license you want to do that, and I know you are a resourceful person and that you are going to do the best of it". So, in a word, his thing wasn't that he was patently "anti-electronics". It was just that within what he was doing at the time, you know, he just wasn't hearing that. He did understand the validity of it. It did make sense to him. I always felt like, and this also goes back to a conversation with Anthony Braxton, I felt like my purpose in the new music was to pursue the electronic path. You know, to try to bring that and the traditional acoustic improvised music thing into alignment somehow. Without being... like some players, who could basically be sitting on stage and checking their emails...

Watson: Unlike David Toop and the post-punk group Wire, who hailed the Apple Mac in music like it was the best thing since sliced bread, I hated it in improvised music because responses were so fucking slow. You might have the best sound in the universe, but you can't get into that state Derek talked about, which was the lift-off for thirty or forty minutes into the collective instinctual realm. Kaffe Matthews got kudos for using samples (and tons of grant money), but her gigs were boring as hell. This special thing that can happen when musicians get together and start playing – unconstrained by anyone's "plan", in free association, playing by ear – Derek loved it. He found it in John Stevens' Spontaneous Music Ensemble, he called it "nirvana". He also found it towards the end of his life with his quintet Limescale. You know, when the music really takes off and you watch your hands moving on the instrument, and you think "That's fucking amazing!" but you are not doing it. At least, not consciously. Something else has taken over.

Wells: Exactly!

Watson: When we get out of our critical conscious ego thing, and something else takes off ... I believe we become a collective animal which is living and breathing, beyond our personal selves. Previously, before starting to play myself, I'd probably have thought "C'mon, this is just musician bullshit". But I've seen it happen, I've been there, and I've

done it. I am a witness! It's what sanctified churches get to, obviously, and guitar groups who disdain the pop narcotic (and both at once with the sacred steel of the Campbell Brothers!).

Wells: And that's why documentation and recording is so important for this music, and especially for me. I tell you, I have no idea what happened until I hear the recording. I don't even think to talk about it until I hear the recording. The way I proceed now, I'll sit and play for an hour, then I'll take a break, I'll come back, I'll go to the very first piece. Because I'll have sufficient distance at that point. Then I hear what happened, and what was working and what wasn't working. It was the same thing playing live with the AMM All-Stars when I was in London. I recorded every show I've played with you. I can go back and I can look at those recordings, and say "Wow, just look at those!". I was involved with trying to find places to put myself musically. I have no time to listen and be objective about what I'm up to. There is no time for that. It's in real time, and I have to be responding to the music.

Watson: This for me is ... the history of the revolutionary avant-garde art in Europe: painting, and scribbling, and splashing and doing things that are not on purpose. And then looking at it afterwards with real interest, seeing what happened when you weren't in control or when you were spontaneous. This should be in everyday practice, everybody should be doing this. Everybody should be producing random art... having tons of fun on their kitchen tables with paint, and then looking at what they have done and finding extraordinary things in it. Better than all those neat little photographs on Facebook.

Wells: Exactly! And let's not conflate spontaneity with basically not knowing what you are doing. We can't confuse these two things because they are not the same. In my experience, being spontaneous musically is hyper knowing what you are doing. You are so locked in to the present time that you are beyond your ego and beyond your concerns for your technique. You are right there, at the essence of your beingness as a musician.

Watson: "Purposefully" and "consciously" seem rather restricted. It's like a very small sliver of what you can do, in comparison.

Wells: Yes! This is so important, and this is what the process of mastering an instrument is all about. I'm at the point in my life with the bass where I am not worried about my technique and not insecure about it. I can focus on being musical in the moment. Fully spontaneous and fully in command on whatever that moment requires me to do musically. And we are talking about moments here. We are not talking measures or anything. It is real time. You remember when I was playing behind John Plant? That's what we are talking about. That kind of spontaneity. It's like there, you are right there. You can only do that when you are not hung up with other things, and concerns about techniques. For the longest time, this was my problem with the Chapman Stick. I was all hung up by my technique, my concept for the instrument. And I was listening to all other players, as I said, we all know each other. A few hundred guys in the whole world and a couple of women are playing this instrument. I am listening to all of them. And they are all doing pretty much the same thing ... It's beautiful, but still there has to be something more.

Watson: The "more" happened in twentieth-century music. Twentieth century music exploded what music can be, and produced such depths and silences and huge events! When I heard you play at Zappanale, you and your bass were doing that, and that's why I came and spoke to you, because I saw you knew you could do all that on bass. You weren't simply playing what's known as "the bass part", which is what most people deem "good" bass playing. I still call advanced music "twentieth-century music", by the way, because I think everything has gone backwards since the 60s. Talking to Valentina Scheldhofen Ciardelli, whose bass playing and projects I adore, I was shocked to discover that in music schools now, the twentieth century doesn't exist. She goes from Richard Strauss and Puccini straight to Frank Zappa – with nothing in between! Twentieth century music – Schoenberg, Bartok, Varese, Boulez – is forgotten because it doesn't "put bums on seats", so it's not a viable thing to play... It's shocking!

Wells: It's dangerous music! That's the issue. That's why I never liked music in academia. Because for me, music started at Wagner. And it was Wagner through the Second Viennese school to the Columbia electronic music thing to Braxton... that was my timeline. Whereas in the music schools they were ... Palestrina and Bach! It's a totally different timeline. That music is beautiful and everything. I have scores here by Bach and Satie that I would love to play on the Chapman Stick, because they are beautiful music. Still, we know–you and I and Derek know–that music has gone beyond that.

Watson: Music got beyond "music", it became a social movement – maybe blocked and betrayed and defeated, but still a social movement. It made things darker and brighter and have crisper edges than they were before. I love what Sun Ra said to his musicians, this is a John Gilmore story, Ra used to say: "I don't want you to play what you know, I want you to play what you don't know. All that stuff in between the notes." Being stuck with just the notes you learned is just repeating back the catechism. Science, in contrast, examines sonic realities. Psychic stuff they are not going to teach you in school. And I happened upon a weird development, one I'm still trying to understand. If I get musicians playing what they don't know – "in between the notes"– somehow it combines together, and it all works as music. That's what I am doing with the Xenochronic combinations. If people are in the now, playing their instrument and listening to what they are doing with total attention to the moment – not running through the music, showing they know their arpeggios and their sad chord changes – but really listening to that particular instrument now, and listening to every creak and crack they can do ... If they play like that, I find the instruments will talk to each other, it all sounds utterly brilliant. It's disturbing me, actually. I used to think Free Improvisation was real people in real time responding to each other intuitively ... but now – with Covid and lockdown – I've found this other way of doing things. And it works time after time (to quote Cyndi Lauper). If the musicians are listening to their instrument rather than "playing" it, their musics talk to each other ...

Wells: The more you do this, the more relevance I see in tape music and musique concrète.

Watson: There is difference, though. I crave the velocity of the actual play-

ing, the musicians' intent, their humour and sexiness, their smell. I don't want to leave music behind for pure sound. For me musique concrete is just a creaky door and a church bell...

Wells: Oh, but I am not talking about the material that commonly is associated with musique concrète. I am talking about process. That's where I see you as composer...listen, what you are doing right now is very similar to what Bob Ostertag did twenty or more years ago with his project called SAY NO MORE. He gave a DAT tape to Mark Dresser and the other to Joey Baron and he asked them to fill the 90-minute DAT tape with solo improvisations. He cut those up, and basically did what you are doing, but he took it a step further – and this was the frightening part. He took the improvisations and after constructing the pieces and everything, and then he transcribed them and he gave them back to Joey and Mark. He said "Learn this because we are going out for a tour"! I hope you don't do that [laughs].

Watson: I hope I'm keeping something in there which reeks of the players... there's something derived from John Cage which is popular in the Art World, where the "concept" is all-important. It's weird because these people use Adorno's AESTHETIC THEORY and he hated the concept, it's money, the boss, capital as far as he's concerned. In this juiceless zone, you dream up an "innovative idea" which you then get funding to carry out, and you simply put up with the result. And if you say "I don't like it", then you are introducing your "ego" and that's bad because you are bringing in a "judgement". I find the music and art that comes from that invariably boring. And I sit in the audience thinking, Why are we sitting through this? To talk about it afterwards – that seems to be the main reason. That's the reward for putting up with being bored. I resent it, and feel I am being oppressed. If you're bored, then you are being oppressed – and by someone. So, I might be doing something which looks "experimental" by combining musicians who weren't originally playing with each other, but I'm very keen that at the end I have a killer track that will work in a radio show. And I hope people will just turn on the radio at random, hear something and go 'Wow!'. Little Richard remains my model for radio "art".

Wells: Absolutely! And it is a good thing that you keep that perspective, because that is what will save you. That is your saving grace, your redemption

Watson: Thank you [laughs]

Wells: The closer we stay to the source, the better off we are.

Watson: What's the source here?

Wells: It's Little Richard!

Watson: [Laughs] You know, Jair-Rohm, I have a box set of Little Richard's Specialty recordings. And I bought it shortly after buying the Sun Records box set by Jerry Lee Lewis, which is an extraordinary thing. It's twelve LP's and there is not one bad track on it, not one!. It's mind-blowing. But the Little Richard one... I cannot listen to it. It's all stops and starts, it's unlistenable!

[Conversation degenerates into a chat about albums, which we shall spare you. Watson asserts that Wells' band with Thomas Chapin – Machine Gun, the No Wave "noise" band before there was Noise – was better than both Albert

Ayler and John Stevens because it successfully negotiated rock instruments and free playing]

Watson: As a component of Machine Gun, you can look down on the Ayler I believe, Jair-Rohm, even though he's been made into a kind of saint. Because Machine Gun shaped jazz and rock at such a high level... John Stevens' attempts at rock were terrible – and so were Ayler's. You've got to think of me as this penniless, music-obsessed, unemployed young person buying records, feeling so disappointed when the great names didn't pan out... and hating it if I've read a rave review of an album that somebody's friend wrote (you know how reviews work!), and then going and spending money and getting a clinker. And I still feel for those guys who have not so much money to buy records – and not getting a good one.

Wells: I was never so critical of anyone, personally. Now, I'm reflecting on my youth. Whenever I would buy a record, and believe it or not, I didn't buy many records. I was going to buy something either to learn it, or because I judged it as being sacred... And check that out, how many records actually I never bought ... I owned very few of them...

Watson: I never bought any Beatles or Bob Dylan, because everybody had them, so I didn't need to buy them.

Wells: I never bought the Beatles because when the first Beatles album came out and I wanted it, my mother gave me the long lecture of how they were...there's a name for it now... "cultural appropriation". My mother gave me the cultural appropriation lecture. So, there was no Beatles in the house.

Watson: You can explain the vitality of the Beatles, they're from Liverpool, it's a port and there's lots of sailors, loads of bars, loads of music, loads of vice! And everybody swapped anything that worked ...Of course Gerry and the Pacemakers were infinitely better, more power and soul, but they weren't so cute to look at ...

Wells: Listen, I didn't learn to love the Beatles until I lived in Liverpool. And the moment that I got over my disdain for the Beatles was a very moving moment for me, Ben. I can't even talk about it now! Liverpool, that phase of my life was magic. I was living in Liverpool and I wouldn't go to the Cavern, right? But finally, I got it. Living there, getting to understand that culture, that town... you know, all of it. And all made sense to me one day. I have a lot of respect for it now.

Watson: I had the usual Zappa-fan thing against the Beatles, because they were "only in it for the money", they were such a fashionable thing at the time. Obviously, I loved them when I was ten years old, but then I kind of prefered the Stones, they were heavier, more bluesy.

Wells: The Beatles, for me, have always been a boardroom phenomenon, it was a construction...

Watson: So, we finally get to the difficult topic of commercialism! Let's talk about the "Beatles vs. music" issue in a broader way. I don't know if you have read Dave Russell's lament about the music business. I sent you a link, something in INTERNATIONAL TIMES he wrote, quite violent and poetical. Thinking about being a musician, looking at who's successful, and feeling betrayed and screwed by the money people. Did you read it?

Wells: Honestly, I browsed over it very quickly, just to know what was there, because I knew you sent it for a reason. There were things that caught my eye, related to all this Spotify situation that I sent you the videos about. Let me make something clear. First, just like all of our heroes, I always endeavour to make a living with making music. I never condemned the Beatles for making money... The thing was that, the Beatles as we know them today never would have existed without the boardroom taking the reins and creating this juggernaut that they became. That being said, again, I have nothing against the fact these guys became millionaires. That's all well and good. The problem that I have is with the boardrooms, the cigars and the suits being the gatekeepers and final arbiters ...

Watson: And that's why we invent what we feel is "musicians' culture", which is all about the people we agree with. That's what I thought was missing in Dave's writing. It's very aggressive and bitter about the pursuit of fame and money. But he didn't have any inkling that there is something in the music that is oppsite to that. Integrity. Roots. Politics. Iggy Pop! Minutemen! Us!

Wells: Yes, that's right. That's why I didn't dig Dave Russell's piece. I picked up these little red flags signalling "Oh no, not this again". Because, you know, I wasn't put here to be a starving artist. I know I was put here to be a highly creative and productive artist. And for that I am paid. I'm a resource and I get paid for this. I mentioned our heroes. I look at Cecil and I look at Duke Ellington. Here is the interesting thing. You never see Cecil complaining about not making enough money. And that's all Duke Ellington used to do. Cecil was far from poor. Cecil wasn't the kind of guy that was happy to get five dollars and a bottle of wine. When I got to know Cecil, he wasn't picking up the phone for less than ten thousand dollars. Whereas Duke Ellington struggled to make that kind of money.

Watson: Frank Zappa tells a story of seeing Duke Ellington beg a promoter for ten-dollar loan. He was really shocked. Another thing is that Duke was playing for dancers night after night, and it occurred to me that he was learning from the people who were doing the dancing. His musicians were getting these people excited. Their body movements and what they were doing was going into them. And it's that. The instinctive collective thing again. Weirdly enough, it's the "hairshirt improvisor" Derek Bailey who makes me think of that.

Wells: But that's Derek's background.

Watson: A background he deserted! "I retired from music out of an interest in music" is the quote I Digress Indeed picked up on. But it's not having a snobby attitude which is important. It's people-to-people. When Duke said, "When people come and see us, they give us their time, which is their most valuable resource" he was talking a real humanism, a reality, undistracted by either religious pie-in-the-sky or dreams of money. That statement is so materialist in the Marxist sense, it's practically spiritual! Duke may have been broke but that's because he was running a big band, paying all those guys, making sure they were paid. Cecil was great, but ... it was Art money he lived off, really ... Tell me about the scene in Munich when you were starting out as a bass player.

Wells: It was a melting pot. Everybody was cool and non-judgemental. There was competition among us bass players

Green door carapace inversion
Script pan fleeting blue bluemange
I ate the blues she heard mah noose
Xenochrony Cruikshank in cartoon
pants, my gnosis –
Oh flatter bottom ship
shap with torque
of talc!
Rend fill jump for 5-part ecstasy
Doesn't mustard parping with hotdog
Here I am sweating in a high-tech pit
Hard drives pushing out hot air
Hotel Watchumacallit with breezeblok
Good bloke syndicate residue 4-scale
DTL 25.vi.2012
Terminal ribcage adamantine and full of entranced lovers
With garulous partaking not on-a-boat shiny schist never never
"Harrumph" Chatterji with withered sedge spiking the big toe
From frowy frump to Chinese birn caterwaul sorting extra
No time to consider even the backward parting sorrow fish
Shoeburyness burning at the end of the line as you saunter
past Hadleigh Castle
Scrachtschkkmmmmsliiiiiip, the mudslide broke
my ramparts, parting the royal thighs for a
capitalist jerk-ff, here-on-in the heroine spikes
a wheedle into the exchange bargain
Gosh and Darn, it's fusilage ...

because it was very lucrative scene at the time. Other than that it was a very beautiful and healthy environment.

Watson: It was a legacy of the 60s explosion, which was the bringing of a different set of attitudes, liberation, new attitudes about how your body should move, globally. That was going on, and the musicians were leaders of that process. It was part of a revolution. But also getting lots of attention and bringing some people a lot of money. After that, the connection between the revolution and the music subsides. But you were left with different place for everything. Pacome Thiellement found this text Jimi Hendrix said to LIFE magazine in 1969, how in the future we will live in houses made of diamonds and emeralds, and where guns will be a fairy tale. These are things somebody with Hendrix's experience can say. I mean the black experience in the States is prophetic. You read what Martin Luther King said in the 60s – transcriptions of his improvised speeches, they're fantastic – and it's where we are now. They'd been hit by capitalism in the worst way, and their response predicts what's going to come later down the line. I still believe this is what music should be. People talk about politics, and end up in a very manipulative frame of mind. I want to have that moment where people are honest about how they respond to the music itself without thinking "Oh yeah, but it's sexist here or racist there". They're treating music like advertisements, or a moral talk from the headmaster, whereas music is actually a bodily truth.

Wells: The problem is that the reason why these conditions exist have a lot to do with the economics. Not to hammer so much the Munich thing. But go to Munich when I was growing up. What did you have there? First, it was a very rich cultural city. We had a lot of avant-garde and all the disciplines there, long before the music came from the US and took over. And then, there was Disco. People like Silvester Levay, Ralph Siegel. Disco was an incredible boom for the music industry in Germany in general, and in Munich specifically. Everybody was making so much money, like Hollywood. It was crazy. Producers like Silvester Levay were real trained musicians. Like all those arrangements made for the Silver Convention, those LPs you picked up for pennies in the 80s, were done by Sylvester Levay. He wrote all that shit. That's real music. The engineers were real engineers. They built microphones from scratch! That was a very rich environment. I would literally get up, go to a recording session, go to a jam session and then go to a gig that night. That was my life as a teen in Germany. That was everybody's life! Dave King, Jimmy Jackson, all of us. The point that I wanted to make with that was, a lot of the distortion we hear in and around the music today didn't exist then because economically we were much better off. Whereas now, there's less money and so greater competition than ever before. It's like the joke about academia: "Why are academics so ruthless?" "Because the stakes are so low!" And this is what happens to the music now. You have Free Jazz musicians dissing Justin Bieber because nobody is making money anyway. Bitter, angry and starving. We are turning that around, in the US. Specifically, in New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Because the playing field is levelled now. Nobody is going out and playing anywhere, because of the Covid lockdown. Everybody is equal. Record com panies have no cloud in that space. Spotify has no cloud in that space. This

video that I sent you about Spotify was that the old music business model that we all have lived in is gone. It's never coming back. Because the Spotify has just sucked all of the oxygen out of the music world. What we are doing now with Resonance FM and Soho radio, online streaming concerts and other things from our bedrooms: this is the new alternative universe, the ultimate way forward.

Watson: I meet people whose musical experience is defined by Spotify and Youtube. They like something and the system feeds them more of the same. You like Drone? You can listen to nothing else all year! They are stuck in one genre. But Zappa taught me to try everything, to go against my "taste", check out what the uncool people are into, make up my own mind. The way you and me think, we refuse to be closeted in a genre. We are saying, Music is a weird tiny uncanny blob that includes the All. What's Jimi Hendrix? Is he R&B? Is he Rock? Is he an "electronic composer"? Is he Free Improvisation? Is he politics? Fuck off, he's all of these things. And you have to be great at all of them. There is no point in specialising. My politics and my thing is to drag people out of this Delusion of Ulro that they are "the kind of people that listen to this". For me, that is capitalist oppression. A form of being a consumer. We need all these things – and that's my fight.

Wells: That's exactly what the fight is! You are right when you relate it to consumerism on the capitalist model. Because, the only way for that model to work is when you make people believe they must buy this or that. When they think they must identify and personalise with that product. One of the "Aha!" moment for me was when I was playing old folks nursing homes with the saxophonist Ken Simons. And we are playing wild Free Jazz in the nursing home, and the people listen and come to ask for autographs after the show! This is in New York City, and it just proved to me, that if you allow people to access something good, honest and pure, they will love it. Once you start dictating to them how they are supposed to feel and per-ceive whatever, then you know it's fascism. Totally oppressive.

Watson: I wanted you to ask the drummer you're working with, Ronnie Burrage, what he thought of Terry Bozzio, who drummed for Zappa in the late 70s, because I find their drumming styles quite similar.

Wells: I didn't ask Burrage about that.

Watson: I find the relationship of Zappa's musicians to the rest of the music world interesting. The Mothers of Invention, the first band, they were roots guys – Jimmy Carl Black, Don Preston, Bunk Gardner – and they were always great. Bassist Roy Estrada went on to Captain Beefheart's Magic Band and Little Feat, two of my favourite bands. But the Berklee-School-educated musicians Zappa used later, Steve Vai and so on ... after they got a taste of fame, they just went and released rubbish. I mean, have you heard Missing Persons?! I don't like anything Zappa's musicians did on their own after the George Duke period. They were good for what Zappa wanted to do, but their idea of pop was condescending and meretricious. Bozzio likewise. I saw him at Zappanale #20 in 2009, where they built him the largest drumset I've ever seen, he just pattered around on it. It was embarrassing! But when Bozzio was really playing in the '70s, he had this sound that reminds

me of Ronnie Burrage when he was in Third Kind of Blue, which is making all the cymbals and drums create a seething mass which moves around. If I got Guy Evans to listen to it, he'd probably say, "oh that's just a funk shuffle" or "a boogaloo" or something, you know it's probably very simple. I just haven't got the right vocabulary for it. I am particularly interested in getting Guy to play to the last Ilcontribution you uploaded. Having Guy on board has been amazing for the band. He puts this iron framework into the music, his sense of time is so absolute ... or, another image, he's put a frame of gold around what we do!

SPECIAL NOTE #4
Musical items played, recorded and uploaded to the Internet Archive – the great free public library in the clouds set up by San Francisco philanthropists – are tagged "Ilcontribution" since they are contributions to LATE LUNCH WITH OUT TO LUNCH. Like all Xenochronic AMM All-Stars music, they are contributions to the digital commons, pitched against the bourgeois illusion that only prices charged make value.

Wells: We were touching on that earlier. You know, the idea that I never was so critical of anything compared to you. There were things that I just loved, like Jack Bruce and Miles Davis and Ayler and Dolphy. Anything from any of these people was just perfect. Then there was stuff that all of my friends were into that I also thought was great.

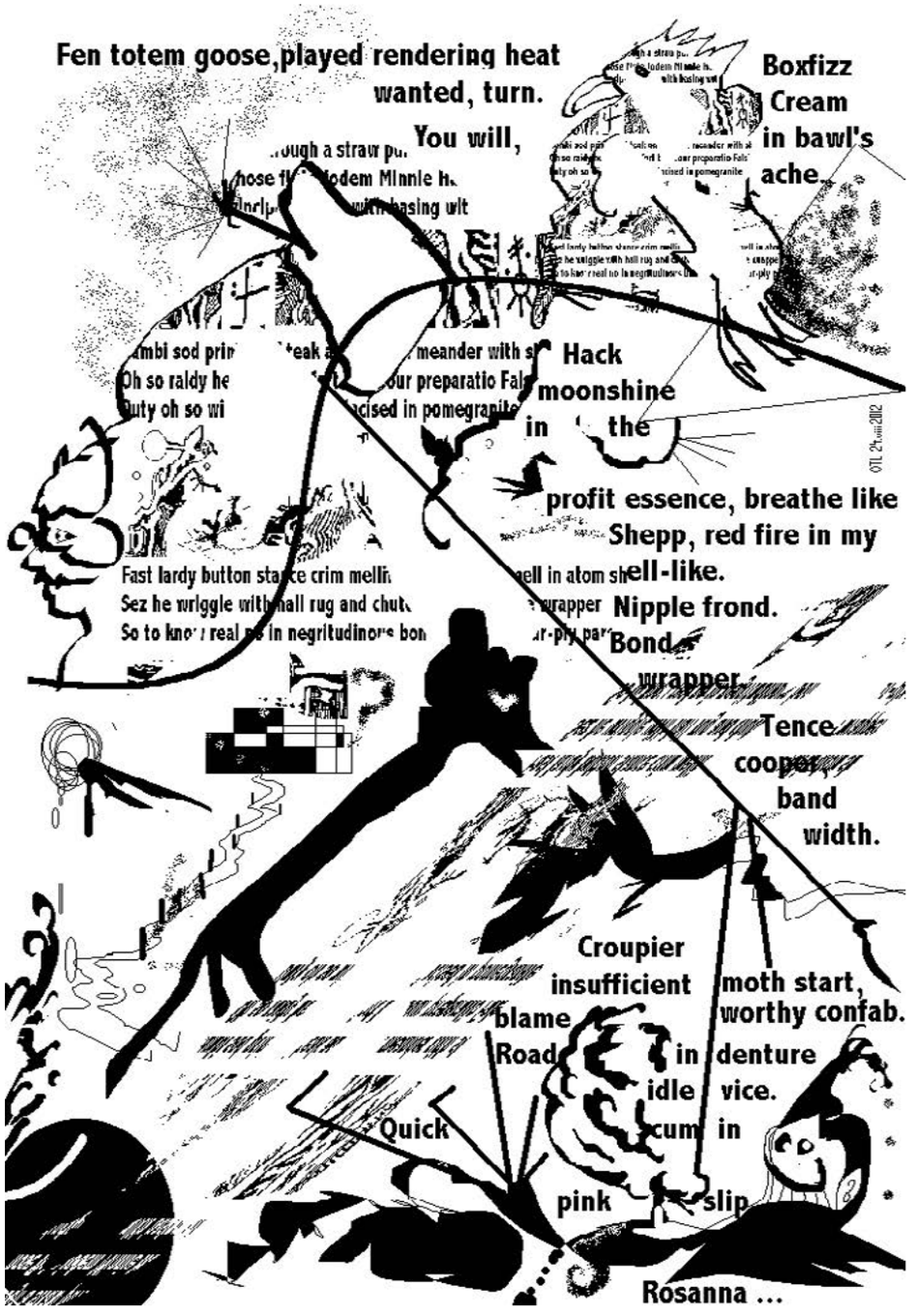
Watson: How did you deal with your friends when, you know, you like Cream and they come along with an Eric Clapton album?

Wells: I've never liked Eric Clapton. I didn't even like Clapton when he was in Cream.

Watson: C'mon! They're fantastic, some of those wild careering blues jams.

Wells: I'm not talking about the product of Cream. I mean those albums were always great to me. I'm talking about Eric Clapton personally. I don't care what anybody says, but Jack Bruce told me personally things about Eric Clapton that confirmed my reasons for disliking him.

Watson: You know I lost my political virginity with the Socialist Workers Party and Rock Against Racism. The latter was based on reacting against Eric Clapton's infamous racist rant at his concert in Birmingham in 1976. But I disliked his records long before that, as soon as he left Cream in fact, this fuzzy comfortable sort of... what was it? Background music for long-hairs to drink Southern Comfort to? It's phony, and it's boring to listen to. He was doing this pseudo-American-type music that rhythmically was fuzzy and easy, pretending he was some kind of "authentic voice", it sucked. It was just an atmosphere. It didn't have any crispness to it. I do like rhythmic crispness in music, the sense of "we are now" and each micro-moment really matters. If you get rid of that, I don't know quite exactly what the music is about, except "sounds like". It becomes kind of wallpaper, kind of fuzzy. I had that reaction against Clapton long before his great political gaffe. He made so much money and he was so famous, but if you were against Clapton, you were horrendous, you were pissing on the Buddha of the scene, you know? Until Punk – and Roger Huddle's famous letter to NEW MUSICAL EXPRESS denouncing Clapton and calling for an anti-racist movement, which



turned into Rock Against Racism, then you were allowed to be against Clapton, but that introduced another set of rules. Zappa was out, for example. And no-one talked about John Coltrane.

Wells: Again, consumerism and capitalism cannot exist without imposing rules. As much as I was really about Punk, you know I went from the Stones straight into Punk, I still, in retrospect can see where it was a commercial creation ...

Watson: You were part of No Wave, which I loved. Because it was like the harmolodic free-jazz people with ears – musicians! – realising there's a gap for us here, and let's get in there. Chaos and Noise and Politics are vogue now, So, okay, we'll give you Noise!

Wells: And, it was very organic. Whereas Punk ended up being appropriated by the marketeers...

Watson: Esther Leslie just wrote a review of a book on Punk.

Wells: Oh, yes, you mean the new one about Poly Styrene?

Watson: Yes. When I first met Esther, we would read everything each other wrote. But she has written so much, and been so busy. I really like what she did with it, because I couldn't read the fucking book. It repelled me! It was lying around the sitting room and I just couldn't stand it. It had these industry-popstar arseholes like Neneh Cherry (whom I loved when she was with Rip Rig & Panic, and then she just became so boring when she became a success). Just doing that celebrity thing of boosting themselves for having known somebody who's now conveniently dead. And they'd say about Poly Styrene, "Oh she was so creative and I loved being with her, but she was very difficult and had mental health problems.". It's just those idiots couldn't see what she saw. I mean, she was "mad" in the way Iain Sinclair describes suffering people in Hackney "driven mad by seeing things as they really are". I think she had that. I think she really saw something. X-Ray Spex were one of the most powerful punk bands. They had this velocity and impact which was like Little Richard. Amazing. And you read this book of all these people spouting off who made their names through Punk and became TV celebrities. They're just full of shit. I don't like them. They don't know anything about music. They don't know about anything other than fame. So I couldn't read it. But Esther managed to write a review, using it as a platform for talking about her own relationship to Punk, so I thought that was good. It's funny because you were a bass player in soul bands, and yet you liked Punk. Isn't that a bit weird?

Wells: No, because you have to remember where I am coming from. All this stuff was happening at the same time. I was playing with Embryo ...

Watson: Tell me about Embryo, I don't know them..

Wells: Embryo was a German band that...

Watson: Krautrock?

Wells: No! It is often credited as the band who invented World Music.

Watson: Oh!

Wells: I mean, Embryo was a German experimental rock band, not unlike Amon Düül ...

Watson: Well then it was Krautrock!

Wells: Yeah, okay, you could call it Krautrock. Embryo falls between Can and Amon Düül.

Watson: Well it is Krautrock then, in England we call Can, Amon Düül and Faust Krautrock.

Wells: Anyway, so I was playing with Embryo, and also doing disco sessions, I'm playing with what is now a cult blue-eyed soul band or "Northern Soul" band called Ruby and the Mud Flaps. It's so funny. There is like a society in the UK, a Northern Soul society...

Watson: Wow, it gets more complicated. Do you know what Northern Soul actually is?

Wells: Well, at the beginning, I thought it was like Rick Astley.

Watson: No no no no [laughs]. Well, I know Northern Soul boys in London. They're working class. It's about white working-class kids being obsessed with Black American music. The records all sounds like Tamla Motown from the 60s, except it's all really rare and collectable.

Wells: Yes, that's right!

Watson: And you know how much I like Swamp Dogg? My friend Anthony Davies is a Northern Soul boy to the max – that's how he learned his music. I'm into Zappa and all this (to him) "middle-class/weird" shit. I discovered Swamp Dogg because he adopted Zappa's "No commercial potential" shtick on his debut LP as Swamp Dogg in 1970 TOTAL DESTRUCTION TO YOUR MIND. We have these continuous argument about music (i.e. he's a real friend!). And I am always going on about Swamp Dogg. Then I realised that Swamp Dogg was "Little Jerry" who had an obscure Motown-sounding single that's considered a stone classic in the Northern Soul clubs! [laughs]. We finally bonded on our mutual love for Esther Phillips, we played her duet with Swamp Dogg 'Our Love Ain't Worth Two Dead Flies' and drank a bottle of Bushmills together.

Wells: It was the same thing in this band that I was in called Ruby and the Mud Flaps. We had some moderate success in Germany, and then 10–15 years ago I am on the Internet, and it turns out that this one single that we did called "Breezy" ends up as some sort of underground cult "classic" in the Northern Soul scene. So, there I am in Munich, I am doing Embryo, doing disco sessions, playing with the Mud Flaps and playing Free Jazz, basically any- and everything...

Watson: What did you first hear about punk? Did you read about it?

Wells: No, what happened with Punk and I was, in 1977, while I was still in Germany, I caught wind of... to be really honest with you, I don't remember so clearly. What I do remember is that when I moved to the US, in the beginning of 1979, there was Bush Tetras and there was The Dance, and there was a bunch of other bands. You know, there was all of this activity around Punk rock at that time. There was CBGB's . And that was what I gravitated to. I know that before I left Munich, I was very impressed with Punk to the extent that I did this band. Because I had all this jazz stuff going on in my background.

Watson: I love it, because the conventional notion is that Jazz and Punk are at opposite ends.

Wells: My mother used to take me to this club in Munich called the Tabarin Bar on Sundays where they had this jazz jam session. That's where I met Jan Hammer, who was a remarkable drummer.

Watson: The famous fusion keyboardist who did the Miami Vice theme? All the best composers and musicians start out as drummers ...

Wells: Well, that's flattering.

Watson: Wait, you're another one?

Wells: Yeah, I played drums until...

Watson: Gah! Every time! All the musicians I admire started out as drummers! Frank Zappa, Marvin Gaye, Evil Dick ... now you.

Wells: The thing is that my mother would take me to these jam sessions in Munich run by a drummer named George Green who swore that he was the man who "brought Jazz to Germany". At this jam session were some heavy players. Klaus Doldinger would be in these jam sessions. Lothar Meid was the house bass player. You might not know his name. He has passed on now. He was one of the top electric bass players in Germany. He is on everything! If you've heard any of these big German records, chances are it's Lothar Meid on bass. He also did a lot of disco sessions because everybody did disco sessions. I can just rattle off name after name. There were just a lot of heavy names in the jam sessions. These were the first jam sessions I went to, and where I learned to play Jazz. Later, I had this idea that I wanted to do a band that was doing Jazz with a punk sensibility, because that energy in punk rock was what we found in Free Jazz. Then there was the traditional jazz thing – the technical thing that was missing in Punk – that there was plenty of room for. So if you just electrify what Ayler was doing, and give it the passion and the brashness, in-your-faceness and confidence of Punk, then you would have something.

Watson: In 1979, I was finishing at Cambridge University. I had cut off all my hair. I was into Punk. I rode around on a bicycle with "OUT TO LUNCH" painted on the back of my mackintosh raincoat. I was listening to BYG Free Jazz records recorded in post-68 Paris – BLACK SUITE by Jacques Coursil with Anthony Braxton on contrabass clarinet (Coursil! that's where Braxton got the chunky-knit sweaters and pipe from) – making collages out of the leaflets being posted through my front door, and saying post-68 Free Jazz is the same thing as Punk! We are brothers Jair-Rohm.

Wells: Exactly! I can't remember what I called this band. There were two bass players, myself and Wolfgang Schmid. He was playing with the Passport at that time.

Watson: Did you get the idea from Ornette for the two bass players? In my opinion, the only thing better than one bass is two basses. I love two basses. You and Cloughie, the bassist from Rancid Poultry, the lost legends of Yorkshire Krautrock! I can't wait to see you two onstage with AMM All-Stars when Covid is over and we can stop being Xenochronic!

Wells: Yeah, I don't know where I got the idea. More people should do two basses.

TAKE SWAIN PHONE MAN BRINK-ON BABY POCAHONTAS LIPS
FINNED CARGO ABSOLUTE PALE ALE RINGMASTER WODEN
TRAINED FAILURE GEEGAW READYMADE POKE 'EM SLOW BOP
PICK SKIT BEFORE BLAH VERY WHEN DODO KEEPSAKE MAJOR
AS PANG RANG SALLAH DUTAH PEEN KEEK FRIZZ MURDER
CINÉ KEANER VOGH HAPPY TANTRUM SIM CHECK FRAMER
NOPE MOWER DRILLBANK MEADOW LOUT DREAR SPENDER
CURLY HAYSHINE GREET PAT INSTEP ABACUS HOSTING-MAT
PRETEND BAIT MAKEABLE SLEAZE FINK RENDER RODRIGUEZ
VERGE SUGAR PRANCE POTTY PICK-UP STACCATO BINGE-UP
PLATITUDINOUS PLATYPUS INSUP NEVER-SEE BOLUS CURLER
HAILED FLAT SCREEEN IN SHALLOT LAIR TRIPOD STICKMEAT
SURPRISE MINT TOGGLE WITH GOLD SUCRE-PAPIER RIZLA
SHEWN MINION GREASE SIPPER FAN DOBBER PRETEXT SNIFF
SURE CUT DRESS DIMMER PAIN MINGE CRETE THRONE STONE

Watson: I interrupted you, you were talking about Embryo and the band with the two basses.

Wells: Yeah, then I got the idea that Punk and Jazz had common points of reference that more people should have been conscious of. I was hanging out with Jimmy Woode, who was like my dad. He was like my mentor. I have spent a lot of time with him. Through him I got to know Tony Scott, Johnny Griffin and Mal Waldron, Billy Brooks, Charles Tolliver. All these jazz musicians. They were all living in Munich at the time. Woode was the de facto bass player of pretty much all of these groups. Especially when guys would come over from the US to Germany on tour, they wouldn't bring a bass player because Woode was there.

Watson: So you found this bubble of the American jazz community in Munich?

Wells: Exactly! But these guys were punk fucking rock! These guys were so hardcore that they made a lot of visible punk rockers look like just posers. Because they were by comparison. These guys were really hardcore. They were some hard men.

Watson: What does that mean?

Wells: They were just Punk. Well, there was the social and political thing. They weren't afraid to verbalise what they really felt about the establishment. They were anti-establishment long before it was fashionable. That is why they were in Europe because they could not live in the US. They would have ended up in prison.

Watson: It's like they're political exiles, ever a source of radicalism. Look at Karl Marx and countless others. All this business about "If you say this in DOWNBEAT you get in trouble, you won't get gigs ..."! I know, I went through the wringer at WIRE magazine for what I said about 9/11 and US imperialism. My friends in Helsinki – the Rab-Rab collective who asked me to do this interview – published a book with Archie Shepp which included his original DOWNBEAT writings that made him so unpopular with promoters and critics. And Archie Shepp is saying such direct, great things, it's lovely. I've never talked with you about Archie Shepp. I love him as a voice on sax, he is one of my treasured voices, up there with Esther Phillips and Hank Williams..

Wells: Of course, I've always been very fond of Shepp...

Watson: That means you don't like him as much as me [laughs].

Wells: Well, I don't know him like you know him.

Watson: Did I tell you this story? I took Mordecai [Watson and Esther Leslie's son, then ten years old] to see Shepp at the Barbican in London a couple of years ago. When Shepp first got onstage, he talked a bit to the audience as he settled in. He made a distinction between art songs and folk songs. Folk songs – nobody knows who wrote them; art songs – written by somebody. It straight away got rid of the whole black/white, blues/classical, scored/improvised distinctions ... it's a fantastically intelligent thing to say, because it gets rid of the race thing, that parochial US obsession. It applies to Bartok and the Romas just as much as to the US situation. He said that, and then he just tried out his tenor to see how it would sound there, blurted some noise, and Mordecai glances up at me

with a look of gratitude, because the first band had been a bit straight, you know, demonstrating their chops rather than genuinely communicating. It was like, "He's not gonna be boring, dad!". He was completely right. Shepp was working with a London gospel choir and Cleveland Watkiss, fantastic. Mordecai was dancing in his seat. I was too, but the audience were ... passive.

Wells: Don't get me wrong. Archie Shepp is very important. The thing is that I never hung out with Archie Shepp. So for that reason I can't say anything more about him than anybody who has read an interview. I hung out with Johnny Griffin, and I feel like I have some grasp of who and what he is.

Watson: Archie Shepp's explicit politics were quite rare among the players in New York at the time – to be brave enough, or maybe angry enough, to say those things in DOWNBEAT. I mean, Derek Bailey got – from Anthony Braxton I think – a really anti-Archie Shepp thing. It was truly upsetting what Derek Bailey said to me about Archie Shepp. Those two had no respect for Archie Shepp at all. They considered him as coasting on his politics rather than being a good musician. He was a traitor to "art". I found it shocking. I still wonder why Derek and Anthony Braxton held such contempt for Shepp. The Rab-Rab people really like his politics and his music. They really liked that he named capitalism and talked in that way. I know you and Eugene Chadbourne have real respect for Anthony Braxton. For me, I loved Braxton until '77–'78, and then I think Braxton became an academic, and only played with students, not with his peers. I don't respect him after that. And I saw a concert of his in Belfast, he played a really tedious set. I think Braxton lost it. He went over to the other side. Again, should we be saying this in public? Yes, we should be saying this in public.

Wells: Let me temper that by saying this: Anthony Braxton was a big part of my own development. I wouldn't be who I am without his guiding hand.

Watson: Nor would I! He matters to me. I was gonna have SUN RA/COLTRANE/BRAXTON – those three names – written in studs on my leather jacket. Because of that commitment, I feel betrayed by him turning into someone who makes so many duff records.

Wells: That's where I draw the line for myself personally. Because once again, I just don't feel like I have enough authority to... You know it's kind of, I don't know, it's Braxton. I guess it's different levels of perception.

Watson: If we were together, in person, hanging out and playing records rather than using Zoom, I could play you Muhal Richard Abrams records. And what Braxton is doing now would appear like a copy, an academic version, and not a real thing at all.

Wells: Again, it depends on what we're listening to and why and how. For instance, we listen to Bach as a body of work. I guess that's how I listen to Braxton. I look at Braxton as just a body of work. You know, I studied Braxton, I studied the different forms, the twelve-type musics, the ghost trance music...

Watson: I'll tell you how Eugene summarised what Anthony Braxton and John Zorn think of Frank Zappa: "Oh, they said that he used all the techniques, but all those techniques are now known,

they are just modern music techniques, so nothing interesting there." They are talking about did he use conduction, did he use xenochrony. You know, all those mechanical, technical things about composition. And I thought, Zorn and Braxton, you soulless apolitical bastards. You do not understand what communicates. You do not understand the weight in somebody's mouth. You are merely technical "composers". You just long for the silly pedestal granted Beethoven posthumously, you're the fucking bourgeoisie, making economical mud pies out of dead labour and real struggles – so, actually, Zorn and Braxton, you're off my list! It made me angry. They couldn't see that Zappa had a heart full of honest indignation with media lies, and wrote pointed political satire and had a searing anger that matters more than, "Oh, did you know that if you get a musician in a cubicle over there playing and you add this it's a technique to make something cute happen." Fuck all that! Really, fuck Zorn and Braxton! Also, Zappa could write a tune, unlike those two career-composer fuckers. That's why Valentina Scheldhofen Ciardelli plays Zappa next to Puccini, but not anything by them!

Wells: Just to clarify where I am coming from... I said these levels of perception. I am really trying to figure out how I address Anthony. I read Ekkehard Jost's book on Free Jazz, for instance. I had the privilege to read it in the original language.

Watson: Did you know that is the book Guy Evans was passing around to the band?

Wells: Yes, I think there was an email thread about that.

Watson: Great book! Up there with Leroi Jones and Frank Kofsky. Really nice story from Guy, as usual. One Christmas, he is with his relations, and a brother-in-law he doesn't get along with. The brother-in-law goes, "Oh music! There's a good book..." and he lends him this book and Guy is astonished: "This is a really good book!" Then he lends it to us. And it is really good, typically German, musicological, no sociology, none of that anglophone culture-studies crap – on Free Jazz – showing how constructed and conscious all the various inputs were, from Mingus and Cecil and Ra.

Wells: If I remember correctly, Ekkehard Jost also wrote a biography of Anthony Braxton that I read. I think it was Jost. The thing was, Anthony to me is a significant composer, and he originated a lot of work and ideas that had a profound impression on me from a very early stage of my development. That's what he will always be to me. That being said, Well, here I am in the New York City area. I've been here when he performed at the Iridium few times, and I've not bothered to go and see him. I am not saying this lightly because I know what he is doing now and it's not something that feel I need to make the time to go see.

Watson: Well, I am glad to... you know, it got very difficult to say honest things about icons like Braxton in the context of WIRE magazine and their canon of greats – and the race argument. So ... it's a great relief to be able to swap genuine opinions, Jair-Rohm. I can understand that he was a significant thing at the time. Some of his playing in '74 is like super-intellectual bebop, incredibly clever. Like he's thinking far ahead of the music, it's insane.

THROW DAT THINGY BUSTARD MUSIC REALITY OUT DA FRIGGIN' WINDOW
SHEPP ME OL' DUMB WAITER POLTROON ACTOR FACE WINK ME GOLDEN TIMES
WITH RELIEF KNOT SANDWICH LAIR CAVE BEAR THINK NOT PUT RID
NO THING YOU CAN'T SAY TO ME I DON'T NEED THE STRINGS OR THE GUNS
POOF POOF THEY PREFER THE HUGE GOLD FRAME CARCASE POLITICS
MY MY THEATRIC DUNE DUMBESQUE 'N' PLEAT RUMOUR OLD BORE
URGE VERSUS SOAPBOX EGG RUE BIRTH SPASM SOB BOSS CRYBABY
DIM SIMULATE SYSTEM BURNT TENOR RUBIES CASCADE DELETE FRIEND
WITH 'COS I CAN'T STERP PERPETRATE WINSOME CATTER SQUISH PONO
UDI FRAUDSOME DINNER JACKET HOIPOLOI VISTA UNENDING READYMEAL
SICKSUCK MICK MACDOUGALL DENNY WALLACE INKNOWN TOADSTOOL
FAST EFFIGY FIG PUDDING MONSTROUS GIRATORY SAND SMILE CROC CROC
FFFff
GREET SEEM BEE GRACIOUS SLOP INTO OLEAGINOUS WINEGROWN SHIP SHAPE
NOTE SING HAY BELOFT UNC. NEOWN FREE PRIZE UNTERDRESSEN
TERRATISK TORIALIZED BY SUNKEN SILENT CREW INTO PUD PUD PUD
PPPppp

Wells: Yes, I like his recordings from '74 to '78.

Watson: Yes, and then it evolves into this conceptual stuff and it's just some weak bands with students like Marilyn Crispell. It just got so fuzzy. Never mind.

Wells: Well, we're all human. We all have a trajectory in our development. We will all pass through different stages, and some of those stages will be more interesting to some people than others. I mean, look at where we are now, for instance. What I am doing right now is the most exciting and significant work that I have ever done, and that is true because it is the most recent work I am doing. Yet I know there are people who literally are upset with me because I am not doing this band that I brought to Sweden 35 years ago still. Which was basically a punk band: punk, funk with rap lyrics. I did that 35 years ago! It was good and fun then. There is no going back.

Watson: We have to be free. To express ourselves about what we are. You have to have the freedom to react to things, and not to be locked to some kind of respect hierarchy which means you can't react honestly, voice your first unguarded thought. If I'm with people who mind "what the other people will say", it's like I'm like wearing tight shoes. I've got to get out of there.

Wells: If we go back to '70s again, and we get back to these jazz musicians who for me were the embodiment of punk aesthetics... the first thing: all of these guys were expatriates. Most of them were out of the country because they just couldn't live in the country. They were risking ending-up in prison, or whatever the case might have been. In Germany, especially at that time, they had the freedom to say and be whatever they wanted. So, they were pretty hardcore. They were black nationalists, they were really hard guys [laughs]. And that was pretty Punk. When I got to Sweden in '85 ... Punk was still alive and well in Sweden. Still, after being exposed to what I was exposed to as teen in Germany and then being in the downtown scene in New York City and playing in the Bowery and all of that – Sweden... C'mon, it was just pansy-ass, that was laughable, it was "fashion Punk" by that time. No Wave came out of a very organic and very sincere mix of the instrumental-technical-jazz thing and the freedom rebellious thing of the Punk aesthetic.

Watson: Yes! I think you were friendly to me when I first got in touch because I'd written a review of your band Machine Gun in the WIRE. I loved that band! You must have remembered my name from that review ...

Wells: It wasn't only that. You were the reviewer that I read in the WIRE. You were the guy that was the voice that I agreed with.

Watson: You're quite unusual. You're a musician who reads and finds writers. You know Charles Shaar Murray for example. That is interesting for me, because I found it very difficult as a writer to get involved with music, because of the hostility that so many musicians and improvisors had towards writers. You know, "You're disgusting! You are exploiting us! You are the enemy! You know nothing! You don't play!". I don't think I've ever found an English musician who ever said "I like this writer!". Apart from Derek liking me, that is. [Please Note: Watson is talking about

the 1976–93 period in the UK, now he thinks the opposite: "avant" music is being produced to please writers, and it sucks! Maybe this hostility had a rationale ...]

Wells: [laughs] Listen! I've found it too. When I first went to New York and started to play with [saxophonist] Ken Simon, you couldn't spend five minutes with Ken Simon without him starting to rag about Stanley Crouch.

Watson: [laughs] Well, that's not surprising. Crouch was a fucking traitor!

Wells: It was like an obsession with him. He hated that man so passionately.

Watson: I think we all do in a way.

Wells: Yes, I mean, he is very very unpopular and especially within music circles...

Watson: He was involved with the free-jazz scene and played drums, and then he suddenly sees the light with Wynton Marsalis and says it's all back to playing proper jazz, it's all born-again crap! If you're Milford Graves, you're gonna feel this guy is really evil [laughs].

Wells: He definitely made a lot of enemies. Going back to the whole thing about artists producing recordings that are sub par for that artist, look at Miles Davis's output. There are people that only will listen to Miles from a certain period. And to me, all Miles is Miles. I listen to Ornette, and it is the same Ornette – from Free Jazz to Prime Time and beyond. It's the same voice, it's the same person. It's like Frippe and I used to hang. And Frippe was very disappointed by Albert's NEW GRASS album.

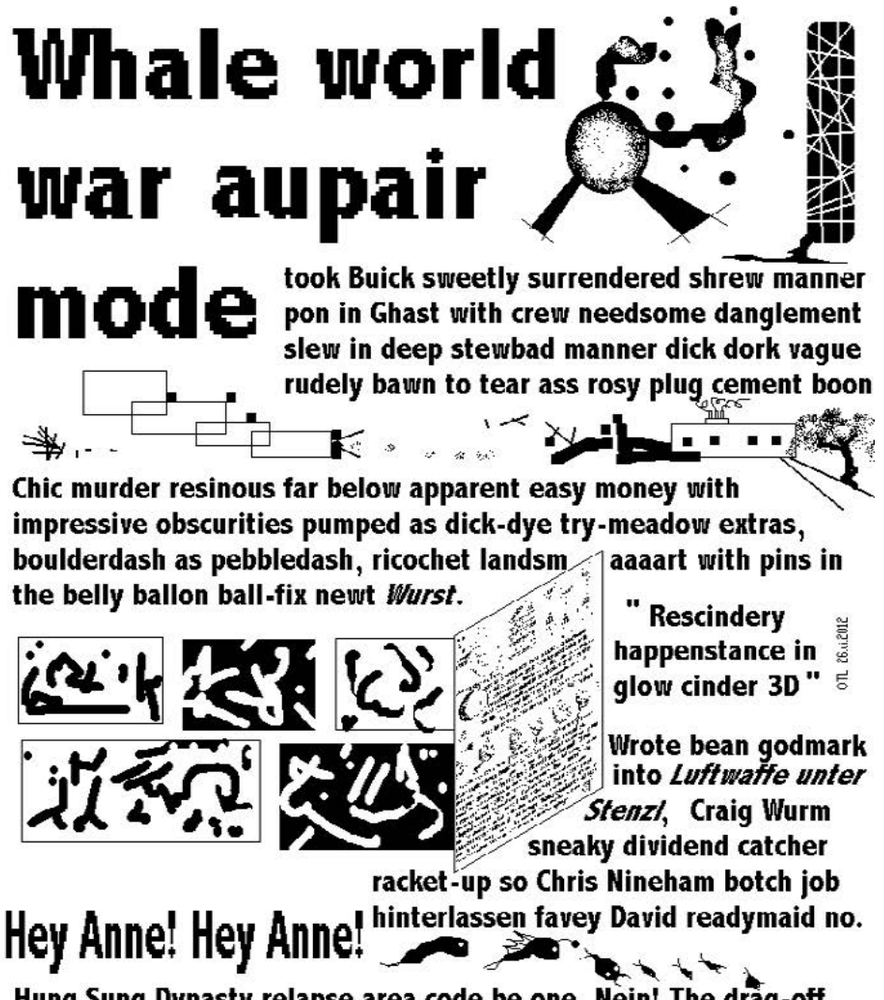
Watson: Robert Fripp?

Wells: No, Frippe is basically the guy who kind of gets the credit for discovering Albert Ayler. He was Albert's best friend. When he was living, my whole thing was "I have to have Frippe in the studio with me because I need the presence of that vibe." The way Frippe and I met was a funny story, because what happened was there is this jazz club in Stockholm called Fasching, they had a jam session. Briefly, they tried to do jam sessions. And I went to one of the first jam sessions they had. I was on the stage playing, we were doing some standards. And this guy in a fucking overcoat and winter hat jumps up on stage with a clarinet and starts just playing over everybody. And I was kind of edgy back then. I stopped playing. Everybody stopped playing. Who the fuck is this guy?! And he carried on, and we kind of ended the set. Then I walked up to him and just yelled at him: "Who do you think you are? Don't you ever do that again!" I just went ballistic! And he just kind of took it, and it ended with him and I sitting at a table ... until basically they threw us out. Past closing time, because he started telling me about Albert – and Albert was the reason I was in Stockholm. Stockholm was like my Mecca because that's where Albert had been. I was following that path, and Frippe was in Albert's life! So he became very important to me. It broke his heart when Albert did NEW GRASS. Albert was proud of that album, he really believed in that album. There are a lot of people who hate that album, yourself included. Still, I can hear the same Albert that was on SPIRITUAL UNITY, I hear that Albert in NEW GRASS. It's all the same to me. It's just Albert.

PAUSE

Wells: I wanted to ask you about the live sessions on Resonance. Was I there at the beginning? Or did they start before I got involved?

Watson: I don't think I can answer that in a simple way. Live sessions gradually evolved from recording stuff with the kids and Peter Baxter – novelties to refresh the ear, so LATE LUNCH WITH OUT TO LUNCH wouldn't be nothing but me talking and playing records. When I started the show in 2002, I came from the BBC, I'd been trained by Derek Drescher, producer of DESERT ISLAND DISC at Radio 3, who wears a cream-colored suit and plays cricket. He is very, very English. I'd been trained by him at Radio 3, and it was all very uptight and English and polite. When I listen to my early stuff from Resonance, I am very like that. It took taking Baby Iris in, and having to improvise because she was, like, spilling orange juice on the mixing desk, to sort of relax that attitude. And I was writing scripts, I couldn't talk live. I was too embarrassed, I dried up. It was too difficult. I had to just write it all out. So the whole thing of spontaneity arriving – and Improvised Music, of course, is not "a kind" of music, it is musical spontaneity – is a development that happened after 2002, which is quite a long time ago now ... and the band arising, again, was another development – which I must credit to Peter Baxter. Peter is the drummer I met through taking Baby Iris to Rhyme Times ... Peter was a librarian – he still is a librarian, actually – and he was the best rhyme timer on the circuit. In England, we have this thing where parents take their babies to the library and sing nursery rhymes together. A librarian leads the session – and they cannot necessarily sing, sometimes they're dire! Of course, this stuff makes all the cool insecure hipster adolescents run a mile! Then I found out Peter was a drummer and he drummed in punk bands. He took us along to his practice space in Denmark Street Studios when they existed – it's all torn down now. He invited us along, and I would make ridiculous mouth noises and Iris would play toy instruments. I was recording, and then I found that bits of the recordings made good radio because they were fresh and funny. So it was like, what makes good radio, rather than trying to make "good music" ... It was always: "What would alert your ear? What would be fresh?". Cause I remember being embarrassed listening to Radio 1 when I was little. I liked the jingles more than the "proper" pop songs! Jingles are the thing which you try to really get people's attention. Like the debt Frank Zappa's sense of musical event had to adverts, even though he was arguing the opposite. So the recording came with Peter, and then Peter started coming in to the studio to play drums at the radio. There was a piano there, so he kind-of forced me to become a musician – in a Punk sense. But it was also a political thing, because of the Association of Musical Marxists [2010-2015], and bringing Peter in to break the division between Free Improvisation and revolutionary politics. That's how the band – the AMM All-Stars – really started. Upstairs in the pub at a meeting, instead of just having a history lesson and talking politics, we'd have some music. Because I've always been upstairs in pubs either doing Free Improvisation or politics, but me and Andy Wilson said "let's mix them!" – and we did that for five years. So the band came from the political idea that we should all just contribute what we could bring to the table and have a good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time upstairs in the pub. Then that sort of went onto the radio. I used to edit the meetings – talk and music – into pieces I'd call "Political Mixes". So, the radio thing I credit for becoming – and there was a piano there – "a pianist". I'm all for non-musicians playing music, but for God's sake find some musicians to help you in your endeavours! I don't quite know when you came along, Jair-Rohm, but it was amazing for me because it was like being "certified" – the kind of musician I would interview for WIRE magazine when I was a journalist, that I'd be a fan of, actually came and wanted to join in this nonsense that we were doing on the radio! Interested in it. That was really bizarre. Jair-Rohm Parker Wells? I've seen him on stage in Zappanale, this is a great musician! I still believe that, even though I know you now.

Wells: [laughs]

Watson: You were prepared to get involved in what we were doing. That's great. You know, Guy Evans coming along now, it's a similar thing. You real professional musicians actually enjoy this kind of under-the-radar free-improvised nonsense that we are doing. You can see something in it, and then you come along and add what you are doing. Then it all starts happening. I love that! I think it is like the Duke Ellington Orchestra playing night after night for dancers who aren't professionals, who were dancing for pleasure, and Johnny Hodges looks around and some woman is dancing in a particular way and this changes his riff. It's everyday life and art really working together. That's what I like to do. So you help with that, Jair-Rohm. Also, I am really grateful to you and glad you got back involved with us after lockdown. You are gonna send in your bass pieces as Icontributions, and we can get Guy Evans play on it and Peter playing with it. I will play melodica and ruin it. We can work! it's great.

Wells: Remember we talked about this already a few years ago? It's good that we're finally able to get it happening.

Watson: We're always looking to pull people in who want to do this thing. My daughter Iris expressed it to me best. She said to me after a Late Lunch where she'd been playing her hand drum, "Oh! I get the idea of your band, dad! All everybody gotta do is just really listen and then play!". Improvisation is about listening first – and then technique and play, and it's that thing about paying attention, which for me is the whole point. That's what I love. People in a room all paying attention to the sound now and then anyone can contribute what they can do. My grandparents were Quakers, that's it: "Don't speak until the spirit moves you ... Then, let's rip it up!". It's not about people clapping a superb juggling act.

Wells: Yeah, it's about creating music together – which description sounds deceptively simple.

Watson: And that's why Derek was saying (actually, Curt Sachs writing about ethnic music), Improvisation is the music that people can make up, sitting there with no technology, no media. Improvisation is an outburst of that ethnic attitude in the midst of the highly technologized world we live in. It's a contradiction, but it's a very creative contradiction.

Wells: Let me ask you one final question. What if this is the new normal? Do

you have a Plan B? Do you have a plan for life in the age of Corona?

Watson: No.

Wells: So, you don't think that your composing could be a new door opening for you? A new direction for you and many others?

Watson: Well, I love Xenochrony as used by Conlon Nancarrow and Frank Zappa, you know, I polemicize for it ... but people have been doing things like that forever. I loved it when a musicologist whose name I temporarily forget, in a conference on Zappa where the "problem" of his use of other people's material and copyright became an issue, said: "Oh, c'mon! Quoting other musicians is as old as the hills in classical music." Xenochrony, overlaying things on each other to cause mindwarp and surprise is something people have been doing forever. It's called interesting music. It's not the copyright invention of some downtown genius or some star professor. My current use of editing software to collate the band's playing during lockdown is simply using what's around – Audacity software which you can download free – to keep improvisation happening at every level, not just a skill in the hands of professionals. And it's great! At the moment, I think it's the best music available, we've transcended the stand-off between the slide-rule and the gutbucket so much better than the sacred cows of commercial Avant. We've done it in the guts of the music, it's not skin tone. But I also think people have done it forever and will be doing it forever. What's gonna happen with the virus and the modern world? I'm not a scientist or a populations statistician, I don't know!

Wells: Well we do know this. We do know that a large number of venues have gone out of business. And we do know that if this type of society continues to develop in this way, even after the lockdown, things aren't going to be the same. People are going to be more germ-conscious, gatherings will be restricted for a long time even after the lockdown. Where venues are shut down, new venues aren't going to pop up and replace them. That whole business model has kind of taken a hit. At the same time I see what you are doing with these – call them whatever you want; call it musique concrète, collage, whatever we want to call these compositions – I see this as being a way forward. Given the possibilities you have with the two radio shows to be able to publish your work ... I think you are on to something, and I'm glad you're doing it.

Watson: Very nice way of thinking about it, Jair-Rohm. But I have to say ... I am 63, and I have kids. After starting a family in 2005, I didn't need to "go out" in the way that you need to when you're looking for a partner, or seeking to confirm your partnership. The whole thing of going out, a lot of it actually is not about going out and seeing music you wanna hear. It's about looking for a partner. You are looking for a lay. That's the situation which the musicians, people who sell drinks, the club owners can use to do what they do. After I found my partner and started to have my family, I didn't need that, so I became an Old Fart who stayed in. Kids are very entertaining – or tiring at least – so that you don't need to go out. It changes your relationship with music and to all sort of things. So the whole business of Coronavirus shutting down the venues didn't really effect me. You are an active musician, Jair-Rohm, so it's different for you. Because the only thing I

was going out to was the events I was organising. I would only go to gigs if I'd organised them. What I do miss is getting the musicians I really like together to allow realtime interaction. When I'm broadcasting the xenochronic things and superimposing people's playing, if I segue to a track where the players were actually in the same room together.... It has a genuine warmth to it, which I miss. I hope we can do it again. But I agree! Let's have fun within this situation. Let's play, send each other files, recombine them and let's use what we've got now. I'm having a ball. I edit for days on end at the minute – and I can't believe what I'm hearing!

Wells: I am glad to hear you say that!

Watson: As Karl Marx said, we make history, but not in the circumstances of our own choosing. We need to make history, but we cannot choose the circumstances, so let's make history, let's make music now – by any means necessary!

Wells: That sounds like a good note to end on ...